CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY

Graduate Studies News

Published by: *The Division of Graduate Studies*
Mailing Address: *1455 de Maisonneuve Blvd. West*
Montreal, Quebec H3G 1M8
Location: *2145 Mackay St.*
Telephone: *(514) 848-3800*

Vol. 4, No. 6, September, 1989

From the Dean's Desk: How to Win
Charles Levin, Ph.D. in Humanities
Norman Daniel Ryan, Ph.D.
in Mechanical Engineering

From the Dean's Desk

How to win.

Over the years I have served on numerous fellowship competitions. I was invariably impressed by the many outstanding applicants and would have wished to reward all of them with the fellowships they sought. Alas, budgetary constraints always prevented this from happening.

At the end of each competition, I used to reflect on many of the borderline cases that either won or lost fellowships by fractions of points. I noted in particular that all of these borderline applications came from outstanding students and I became convinced that the quality of the application often made the difference between winning and losing.

How do you define "quality of application" and how do you teach applicants and their supporters how to prepare good dossiers? To answer this question, we have prepared eight types of model applications, based on case studies of actual fellowship winners. The examples are grouped into master's and doctoral applications, and by Faculty, i.e., Arts and Science, Commerce and Administration, Engineering and Computer Science, and Fine Arts.

During the months of September and October, the Graduate Awards Office will discuss these models in special seminars for faculty and students involved in the 1989-90 fellowship completions. It is hoped that this exercise will raise the general level of awareness of the art of dossier and reference letter writing.

This is the beginning of a three-year process to help our students succeed in fellowship competitions such as FCAR, NSERC, and SSHRC. In the first year, we will concentrate our efforts on graduate program directors, thesis supervisors, faculty members, and counsellors of senior undergraduates. In the second year, we will focus our attention on the student population. In the third year, we hope to integrate these activities into a university-wide action package.

Although our students are already quite successful in these competitions, I feel that we can increase our proportion of winners through this interactive cooperative process.

The seminars will be announced in "The Concordian", "The Link", and "The Thursday Report".

M. E. Szabo
Dean

Charles Levin

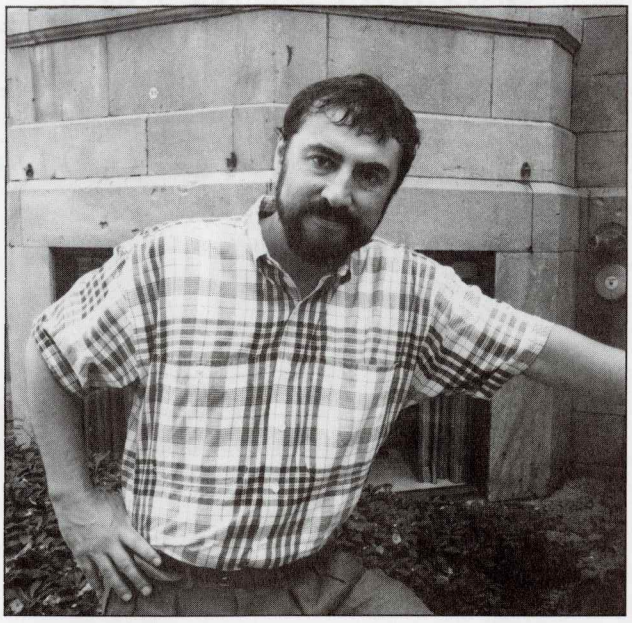
Tackling Psychological Stresses of the 80's

Charles Levin hung up his shingle as a psychotherapist in 1987. Today, he has a successful practice where he treats patients ranging in age from 19 to 52. Aside from his private practice, he is involved in a research project affiliated with the Montreal Children's and Ste. Justine Hospitals. The project involves family dynamics and their link, if any, to suicidal behaviour, specifically, teenage suicides. Levin interviews young adults, aged 14 to 18, who have been admitted after their first suicide attempt, and compares them with a control group.

The hospitals, along with the private practice, provide related experience in clinical work for Levin, who began his training as a psychoanalyst in 1986 at the Canadian Institute of Psychoanalysis. In contrast to psychotherapy, psychoanalysis is a more intensive process which can require three to five sessions a week. But this does not mean that psychoanalysis is always recommended for more disturbed patients, according to Levin. Undergoing psychoanalysis can sometimes be a lonely process. The analyst is always there for the client, but in some ways the analyst is more like an environment than a conversational partner. "I feel I am working best when I am providing a setting which allows the patient to start over in a developmental sense—to experiment with growing up again in more creative ways," says Levin.

Levin shies away from terms like 'mental illness' and 'sickness'; he feels that as a psychotherapist and a psycho-analyst-to-be, he is concerned mainly with the ordinary problems of living—not with medical issues. The therapist serves as a screen and a clearing house for everything going on in the client's life. "The different kinds of therapy can be compared to the different stages of a parent caring for an infant," explains Levin. "Sometimes you have to provide a lot of support: holding, structure, and guidance; but often the patient is just looking for a reliable home base from which he or she can depart on longer, more independent journeys."

When Charles Levin decided to go for his doctorate, he was attracted to Concordia University. "It was an academic choice. The social science programs in other universities were too structured for my needs," says Levin. "I chose the Humanities program at Concordia because it allows students to link their course work more directly to their dissertation research." The Humanities program has a requirement of three areas of concentration. Levin's thesis deals with psychology, philosophy of social science, and communications. He worked closely with Dr. Arthur Kroker, his main supervisor, who provided the support and constructive critical assessment Levin needed to further his research. Levin corroborated with all his supervisors, including Dr. Maurice Charland from Communications, and Dr. Julien Bigras, a prominent Montreal psychoanalyst.



Charles Levin

He finds the Humanities program especially attractive because it has so much to offer in presenting new and interesting combinations of ideas to this university. "It can serve as a forum for the academic life of the university as a whole, which otherwise tends to be fragmented and specialized," explains Levin. "My work benefitted from the cooperation of many people from different sectors of Concordia." Levin contends that when a student's academic interests bridge different departments, it results in more interaction within the university. "The Humanities program has made the effort to create the necessary space for its doctoral students to do original work," he says. "The onus is initially on the student to come up with a good working committee which represents the different fields of research involved. After that, the committee tends to serve as protection for the students, cutting through academic red tape and encouraging them to get on with their work."

Levin's thesis broke new ground in the sense that it offers a new interpretation of recent research in several fields. Levin is particularly interested in the impact which new data on infant cognition and emotion may have on theories of development and communication. His thesis, entitled "An Essay on the Symbolic Process," challenges what he feels to be an overemphasis in the social sciences on linguistic models of psychological and social process. "The rise of the representational function in the second year of life has been the traditional touchstone of social scientific interest in our fellow human beings, and most of our theories about ourselves are geared accordingly," states Levin. "But psychological and social life begin well before that." In contrast to standard approaches, Levin concludes, "development is not just a passage from simple to complex, from undifferentiated to differentiated, from fusion to separate identity; we start life already enmeshed in complex, emotionally meaningful, and socially coherent relationships, as well as having a rudimentary sense of 'individuation.'"

Levin questions Piaget's assumption that mental life begins in sensory chaos, as well as Freud's assumption that emotional relationships are derivatives of simple drives. "A two-month old baby needs to feel connected. The child is certainly dependent in every way; but intimacy and involvement still need to be negotiated emotionally—just as much as separation and independence. Infants have psychological needs which are quite distinct from feeding; they probably have enough cognitive equipment to perceive the nuances in their relationships, and to estimate their overall position in the social environment pretty accurately. They're not as oblivious as traditionally believed."

Levin's thesis is an exploration of how rich life is before we have words, what a child can know before it can speak, what experience may be like before it can be expressed abstractly. "There is solid research being done on perception, memory, cognition, and emotion in the period before motor skills develop and language is acquired," says Levin. "My general conclusion is that the human symbolic process (by which I mean what Freud called psychic life: thinking, dreaming, imagining, fantasizing) is best understood as a kind of interplay between all these different capacities, rather than as a separate function or mental faculty in its own right." In contrast to the linguistic function in the narrow sense, which probably has a precise neurological base, Levin describes the symbolic process as an "emergent property" with no clear ground rules or grammar: "It is just the way that the different aspects of the mind and body interact with themselves and the environment," he says.

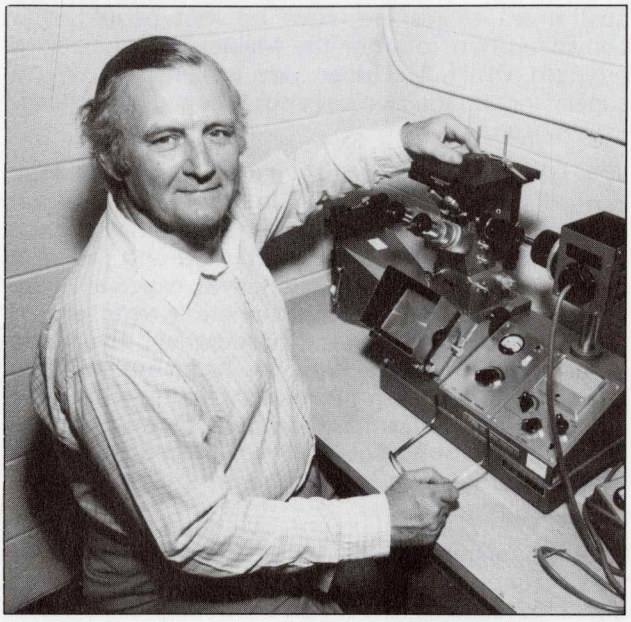
Levin is also interested in philosophical aspects of the mind-body problem, although he does not touch on this directly in his thesis. "There is evidence emerging that separation and loss traumas in infancy may have a dampening effect on the immune system," he points out. But whether different kinds of psychological stress can have a direct causal effect in terms of susceptibility to specific diseases, such as cancer, is still very much open to debate, Levin claims. Nevertheless, he feels that what we call mind and body are really just phases of one loosely integrated system.

Levin's future plans include teaching, hopefully at Concordia University. He is presently working on having his thesis published and continuing his private practice, as well as perhaps working on his post-doctoral degree. He would like to extend the work he has already done into the area of sociology, developing ideas about the symbolic process in groups, but he is also interested in exploring the practical, clinical implications of his theories about symbolization.

Charles Levin has been awarded several prizes, including one from the Canadian Institute of Psychoanalysis for an essay based on a chapter from his thesis, critical of the traditional Freudian view of infancy. In addition, he was awarded a S.S.H.R.C. doctoral fellowship for four years, between 1984-1988, and a Concordia Fellowship from 1985-87, and will most probably be recommended for Quebec's prestigious Prix d'excellence.

Norman Ryan

You Can Go Home Again



Norman Daniel Ryan at work

Life is full of coincidences, especially in Norman Daniel Ryan's case. He left his native Australia in the early 1960's to seek opportunities for higher education and better job prospects in Canada. Aboard ship, he met a man from Montreal who invited him for a visit. During his stay, he fell in love with a French Canadian woman. "I've been here ever since, " he says with a smile. Norman and his wife shared the same academic goals: while she completed a degree in French literature, she also gave Norman the moral support he needed to further his education. Studying at night, and working at Peacock Brothers during the day, Mr. Ryan started taking degree level courses at the Thomas More Institute.

Although he was quickly promoted to foreman, he felt he was doing the same type of work he had left in Australia and he decided to try something more challenging. In 1970, he began to teach welding courses at Polyvalente Macdonald Cartier High School. He was also interested in seeking a degree with a science orientation. Mr. Doug Potvin, who was then in charge of the evening division at Loyola, interviewed him and he was granted permission to be admitted into the part-time bachelor's program. In 1972, he was chosen valedictorian and graduated magna cum laude with a B.Sc. in physics. He was awarded a scholarship for "outstanding academic ability over a prolonged period of time," an award granted to only seven students out of almost 6,000 enrolled in that year. "I have a very analytical mind," says Ryan. "It didn't take me long to figure out that since all my elective courses were in mathematics, it wouldn't be difficult for me to complete the credits necessary for a B.A. in Mathematics."

He then applied to McGill for a Master of Education degree where he was the first student with a non-academic background to be accepted into the program. He was granted the degree in 1976.

To enhance his skills, Mr. Ryan then registered for a welding course backed by the American Welding Society advertised through the newly established Concordia University, which he now claims was the best move of his life. Here he met people who convinced him to enter the Master of Engineering program. Dr. H. McQueen was assigned as Ryan's supervisor and the two have collaborated on research ever since.

Why Concordia University? "It's strange how things in my life have happened since I've arrived in Canada," muses Ryan. "There have been so many chance meetings that have changed my life and I've met people who have been so supportive, especially here at Concordia. Also, the atmosphere is very relaxed and people are friendly and cooperative." Ryan was particularly impressed with the helpfulness of the reference librarians in inter-library loans, who were able to retrieve information from as far away as the Lenin Library in Moscow! "And, of course, all the excellent professors I worked with to complete my degree," he concludes.

At the beginning of his doctoral research, his wife was diagnosed with cancer. Although this slowed down his research, she insisted that he press on with his work and continued to encourage him until her death in 1984. "When I was at Loyola, there were required courses in philosophy and theology. I questioned their validity at the time, although I realized they were there to make one a well-rounded person. However, when my wife passed away, I was able to appreciate their true value. They helped me to cope with my grief."

Between the years 1978 to 1988, Dr. Ryan collaborated with Dr. McQueen on 26 published articles. In 1986, he was invited to the University of Ancona, Italy, by Dr. Evangelista, who granted him a Fellowship to further his research on stainless steel with an electron microscope. A series of papers have been published on the subject, including an article in a recent edition of "La Metallurgia Italiana," (Feb. '89) on Hot Workability.

In the spring of 1989, Norman Daniel Ryan was awarded his doctorate in Mechanical Engineering. His only regret was that his wife was not able to share that moment with him.

Ryan states that in his thesis, entitled "Work Hardening, Strength, Restorative Mechanisms, and Ductility in the Hot Working of 300 Series Stainless Steels" he was able to take theoretical concepts of his research and apply them to industry. Having gone through each phase of metallurgy with hands-on experience, he has been able to bridge the gap between these two worlds.

Janet Bowles, a research assistant for both Drs. McQueen and Ryan since 1980, is enthusiastic about the accomodating nature of the mechanical engineering program which enabled Ryan to achieve his dream. Bowles has high regard for Dr. Ryan. "This degree is just the beginning of his career. He is widely published with Dr. McQueen in the field of metallury." She believes he is well deserving of the international accolades in this field.

Dr. Ryan agrees that his degree is not the end of a dream, but rather a new beginning to his varied career. His research takes him around the world where he is known and respected. In 1985, accompanied by his two sons, he travelled to Japan, China, Hong Kong and Australia where he gave a series of lectures on Hot Deformation of Austenitic Stainless Steels. "I am able to take a piece of stainless steel, twist it, put it under the electron microscope and tell someone clear across the world in Japan how to run their mill. That's how technically advanced we are today," states Dr. Ryan.

The irony of life's coincidences is not lost on Ryan. "In Australia, when I was about 18 years old, I worked in a foundry loading sand in a wheelbarrow for the casting process. Today, I'm teaching courses in metal casting."

Would he return to Australia? "Although my allegiance is to Canada and Concordia University, I eventually wish to become a consultant between Canada and Australia. I left home because there were no opportunities for me then, now I can create the opportunities."

Yes, Norman Daniel Ryan can go home again... on his own terms.

Upcoming Doctoral Examinations

Candidate:	Constantinos A. Balafoutis, Electrical & Computer Engineering
Date:	Sept. 12, 1989 at 10:00 a.m. in Room H-769
Thesis Title:	Dynamic Analysis of Rigid-Link Open-Chain Robot Manipulators Using Cartesian Tensor Methods
Candidate:	Flavia Ceschin, Psychology
Date:	Sept. 18, 1989 at 10:30 a.m. in Room H-773
Thesis Title:	Individual Differences in Social Pretend Play: Motivational, Cognitive and Family Factors
Candidate:	James Alanoly, Mechanical Engineering
Date:	Sept. 22, 1989 at 10:00 a.m. in Room H-769
Thesis Title:	Computerized analysis and design of vehicle multi-body systems.
Candidate:	Zhendi Wang, Chemistry & Biochemistry
Date:	Sept. 25, 1989 at 2:00 p.m. in Room H-773
Thesis Title:	Stoichiometric Interactions of Atrazine and Hydroxyatrazine with Chemically-Characterized Laurentian Soil and Its Key Components

REMINDER

The deadline for the final submission of theses for students planning to graduate in Fall 1989 is Friday, September 22, 1989.

Editorial Committee Chair: M. E. Szabo
Editor: D. MacFadden
Writer: A.M. Laurin
Photos: B. McNeil

typesetting: Paragraphiques Ltée
printing: Concordia Printing Services